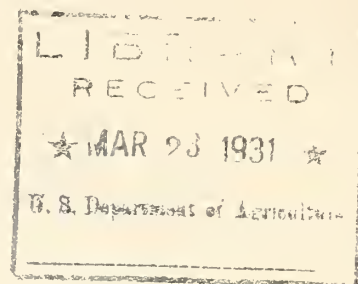
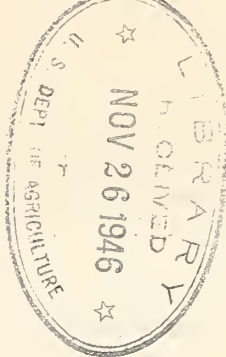


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Excerpt from a radio talk by  
W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern district,  
Food and Drug Administration, U. S.  
Department of Agriculture, broadcast  
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## HOW TO READ THE LABEL

### Patent Medicines

I intend no wholesale condemnation of the medicine business nor am I opposed to all self-medication, for there are a great many products which are useful as home treatments for simple ailments and as first aids, but practically all have very decided limitations. Many are entirely worthless. Some are dangerous. I refer only to the nostrums--- the ineffective, worthless, and falsely and fraudulently labeled medicines.

Many medicines have their complete formulas on the label, but do not be misled in instances where an incomplete formula is given. Such a formula may give the names of some of the ingredients and may end by saying something like this--- "and other ingredients." Such a formula is almost as bad as no formula at all in so far as advising you of the character of the product is concerned, and a product so labeled is still a secret preparation. Reading labels will help you to understand this.

Another form of misleading labeling purports to give the composition of the product on the label, but includes items in the list which are themselves fanciful and meaningless names.

Do not be misled by size and arrangement of the type and printing on the label. The label may say that the medicine is useful in, recommended for, or is indicated in certain diseases, which will be named on the label. Even though qualifying statements may precede the list of diseases, the very naming of them on the label may hold out promise of cure to those who have such diseases. This impression is sometimes furthered by a prominent display of the names of diseases, in large type. Such a label may read, for example "shortens paroxysms of coughing in whooping cough". By using large type for the words "Whooping Cough", one may get the idea that the product is a competent treatment for whooping cough -- unless one reads the label carefully.

And then there may be misleading pictorial designs, such as pictures of human organs, on labels and these may give a false impression that the product is curative for diseases of these organs. Pictures of a fat woman and a lean woman, accompanied by the time-worn expression, "Before and after", give false assurances that the preparation is an effective reducing agent. The old, "I do", and, "I don't" slogan accompanied by two pictures, one showing a man coughing, the other not, indicates that Jones cough drops will cure a cough. Do not take such pictorial representation seriously. Enjoy them if they are works of art, laugh at them if they are funny - otherwise, pay no attention to them.

Manufacturers may capitalize on favorable popular ideas of drug values, though the popular conception of the value of certain drugs may be all wrong. Many persons believe celery is good for the nerves, but the truth is that the sale of celery compound for the nerves is monumental nonsense.

Then, again, you will find label representatives such as, "To be used as directed by a physician", or "To be used only on prescription". Such expressions are often placed on labels of products legitimately directed toward the profession. In numerous cases, however, such expressions are used to deceive the reader into inferring that the medicine is extensively used by the medical profession.

Beware especially of mail-order fake medicines. Many such sale schemes include intricate follow-up systems, and if you get on a fake mail-order medicine's mailing list, you may receive letter after letter for extended periods making appeal after appeal for you to buy the product. Some of these schemes involve gradual reduction of the purchase price. An article offered in the first instance at \$5.00 a bottle may be offered, if you wait long enough, for as low as 50 cents a bottle, and when this offer comes it may be on the basis of a reward to get you interested in the product or as a reward if you will tell your friends about it. The real idea is to get your 50 cents - or how much have you.

The mail-order medicine business -- that is, the business of selling medicines by mail direct to consumers -- is permeated with fraud. The United States Post Office Department has proceeded to deny the use of the mails to hundreds of concerns engaged in fraudulent medicine businesses. The Federal food and drugs act has been repeatedly invoked against fakers of this sort. Many of the schemes for selling advertised medicines direct to the consumer through the mails, are very elaborate. I have in mind one concern which sold a preparation, through the mails, which employed one man to mix the medicine and 22 stenographers to carry on persuasive correspondence with sales prospects. This particular scheme involved the use of as many as 15 different follow-up letters, each making an appeal to the sick person to use the medicine. The medicine was worthless and the letters which went to prospective customers were cunningly devised and filled with false and fraudulent statements.

I want to ask all of the members of my radio audience who have been victims of fake medicine mail-order frauds to write me the details of same and to send me all letters and literature that they may have received in the course of such victimization.

A great deal of capital is made by some members of the fake medicine fraternity of claims made that their nostrums are purely vegetable, that they are composed of plant drugs. Let me tell you that only a few of the vegetable or plant drugs have any particular value as affecting serious diseases, and those that do have value are powerful and dangerous.

Many medicine manufacturers make an appeal to the laity's need of iron in the system. Some claim that their tonics are valuable because of their iron constituent. Do not be misled by labels or advertisements saying that "you need iron for your system". Remember that if you eat a varied diet you will get iron from fresh vegetables, in which form it is best assimilated.



Many medicine labels may in themselves be perfectly clean of any false or fraudulent statements, but you may find on the label a statement suggesting that you write to the manufacturer for further information. When you do, you will get a vast amount of advertising matter in the form of booklets and circular and whatnot, in which false and fraudulent claims of curative effects may be made with abandon. Now the Federal food and drugs act prohibits false and fraudulent claims of curative effect on labels, but it does not control any advertising matter not shipped with the package. It is for this reason that you find in newspapers, magazines, bill boards, on calendars, and display advertising of various kinds, statements about products which are much broader and more definite than those which are found on labels. Compare the statements on labels with those made in advertisements, and if you find the advertisements exceeding in their claims of curative value and effect those that appear on labels, then guide yourself by the label alone and look with suspicion on the product itself.

Read labels carefully and properly evaluate any statements which indicate the limitations of the products. For example, a product may be labeled, "for simple cold", or, "for simple headache". A mixture of jimson weed and saltpetre which will produce fumes when burned, may be advertised as an asthma remedy. It will probably be labeled "for the paroxysms of asthma". Such a product may be expected to alleviate the acute symptoms. It would have no effect on the course of the disease itself. It would not lessen the frequency of the spasms. The labeling, "For the paroxysms of asthma", expresses the product's field of usefulness and its limitations. The advertising "Asthma Remedy" creates a false impression and holds out to the purchaser a promise which the article cannot fulfil.

Another important matter for label readers is to read directions carefully and follow them. This is exceedingly important. You may be dealing with potent drugs, with dangerous drugs, and if you take quantities in excess of prescribed doses, you assume full responsibility. Remember the danger that may result either from the product itself, or from the delays which will occur while you are taking it when you might have been receiving rational treatment for your disorder.

